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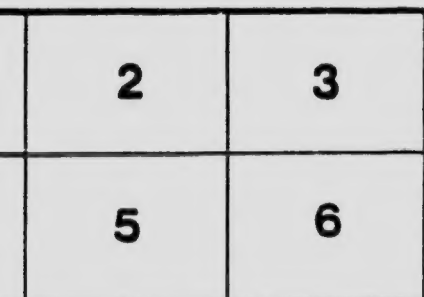
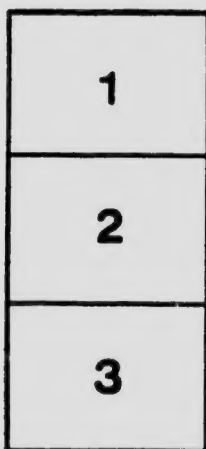
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24/2/19
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Pastoral Letter

OF THE

Right Rev. E. A. LeBlanc, D.D.,

Bishop of Saint John,

TO

The Clergy, Religious Orders and Laity

OF HIS DIOCESE



ST. JOHN, N. B.

1919.

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Edward,

By the Grace of God and Favor of the Apostolic See,

Bishop of Saint John,

*To the Clergy, Religious Orders and Laity of
the Diocese:*

Health and Benediction in the Lord.

DEA · BRETHREN :

With the return of the Lenten season, the Church again commissions her pastors to lay before the faithful the obligations that attach to these days of penance, and to exhort all without distinction to give themselves up in earnestness to the great work of their eternal salvation. When formerly the people of God abandoned the paths of innocence and justice and disregarded the precepts of the law, the Almighty sent prophets among them to tell them of the calamities with which their rebellion was sure to be visited, and of the misery and chastisement with which they were to be overtaken. Jerusalem then covered herself with sackcloth and ashes, the priests prayed between the porch and the altar, and the people came together within the hallowed enclosure of the Temple and brought down upon their unfaithful city, by their penances and austerities, the condescension and forgiveness of the Lord. "Now, therefore, saith the Lord, be converted to me with your whole heart in fasting and in weeping and in mourning, and rend your hearts and not your garments and turn to the Lord your God."—Joel 2, 12:13.

In the same way do we read of the touching spectacles so often presented by the early Christians when the season of sorrow

and mortification came round; all were seized with the spirit of penance. "The old man," St. John Chrysostom tells us, "found new majesty for his white hairs in the severity of his fasts; the young man found in the punishment of his body, the mastery over it which he prayed for, and even tender and devout womanhood inured itself with eager willingness to the hardships of a rigorous and then universally prevailing discipline."

Our ministry today, dear brethren, is, in its end, the same continued ministry of salvation. He who sent the prophets to inspire His people with a holy and abiding sense of the rigors of His chastisements and the eternal unchangeableness of His law, sends us to announce to the faithful the certain punishments which await all who, at this "acceptable time," refuse to obey the salutary invitation given them in order to obtain grace and sanctification. "Delay not to be converted to the Lord, and defer it not from day to day for his wrath may come upon a sudden, and, in the time of vengeance, he may destroy thee."—Ecclus V, 8:9.

The Church, on Ash Wednesday, will warn us all of the certainty of our last end in the very words which God addressed to Adam after the Fall, but the words which were spoken as a malediction to Adam will be spoken to us as an encouragement and guide to our conversion and justification. The ashes which will be placed on our foreheads are to remind us of the utter nothingness of life by telling us whence we come and whither one day we are certain to go. "Remember, man, thou art but dust, and unto dust thou shalt return."—Gen. 3 They are to teach us that all that the world glories in, all that dazzles the intelligence and fires the ambition of men, all the elevation and rank which men toil to reach, all the honors of which they are the worshippers, the authority in which they rejoice, and even the valor of which they are sometimes not unjustly proud—that all this greatness is fictitious and unreal, that it passes away, and that there is nothing enduring or truly great except that which counts for life everlasting. It is the ardent wish, then, of our holy Mother, at this season of grace and propitiation, that all her children enter upon a serious and earnest consideration of the uncertainty and

shortness of life, and prepare for the end that awaits them by the wholesome exercise of a necessary and chastening mortification.

Ever since the disobedience of our first parents we are constantly the victims of the weakness and corruption which have been transmitted to us as a consequence and punishment of their guilt; a constant struggle is going on within us, which the great Apostle of the Gentiles fully describes when he says "the flesh lusteth against the spirit and the spirit against the flesh for these are contrary one to another."—Gal. 5, 17. The tendencies and principles of the one are not only antagonistic to, but are irreconcilable with the tendencies and principles of the other. To treat the body with indulgence, to pamper or nurse it unduly is only to give it power over the soul which it was intended to serve; whereas, by a contrary reason, to chastise it and reduce it to subjection is only to seek to bring about the re-establishment of that right order which has been disturbed, and to secure the overthrow of that tyranny of the senses of which we had been too long the creatures and the slaves. To break our pride we need obedience; to curb our avarice we should practice generosity; to extinguish concupiscence we must mortify the flesh; to break our anger we must pray for our enemies; to weaken our craving for food and drink we should fast and abstain from even things that are lawful; to overcome our sloth and our love for pleasure we need to exert ourselves more earnestly in the interests of our souls. It is only in this way that we can really become the masters of ourselves and regain our normal self control.

Our Blessed Lord has enforced the doctrine of mortification by repeated precepts as well as by His own example. "Who would come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me." "Take heed to yourselves that your hearts be not overcome with surfeiting and drunkenness." "Unless you do penance you shall all likewise perish." The Church has always considered mortification a duty incumbent on her children. When in baptism she ranked us among the faithful, she signed us with the sign of the cross as if to point out the standard under which we engaged to combat. On that occasion we were to declare

perpetual war on Satan and our other foes. From that moment, the mortification of the flesh, the subjugation of our passions and the denial of our own will became a duty from which we could not depart without breaking the faith which we then solemnly pledged to God. From that moment, we engaged to follow Christ in the rugged path which He had chosen; nor could we deviate from it without leaving or dishonoring Him.

We who are filled with pride must not forget, then, how He humbled Himself and became obedient for us unto death, even unto the death of the cross. We who are eaten by cupidity, who are eager to grasp the things of the earth, must remember how He chose to become poor--"the poorest among the children of men." We who are consumed by carnal desires will recall how our Divine Master lived a virgin life whose purity even the basest of men never dared to suspect of the slightest flaw. We who grow indignant at the least interference with our whims, must remember how, amid the agonies of the cross and the jeers of His enemies, He exclaimed: "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do." We who strive for the highest places at any cost, who are grieved at the good fortune of our neighbor, must not forget how Christ effaced Himself and even stooped to wash His disciples' feet. Like the heathen that we too frequently are, though we do not realize it, many of us are forever asking: "What shall we eat and what shall we drink?" but our Lord led a life of abstinence, begged His daily bread, and, amid the fever of His wounds on the cross, was offered gall and vinegar as a refreshment.

Let us keep His adorable example before our eyes this Lent, as an encouragement in our efforts to mortify our rebellious senses. This will enable us to keep the holy season according to the spirit of the Church. Beginning it in union with Christ, we can and will do violence to ourselves and take up the practice of voluntary self-denial, the only remedy for our ailments and the only antidote for the poison that has entered our nature as the direct consequence of sin.

You will not fail, dear brethren, to prepare yourselves at an early date for a good confession that you may recover God's

friendship, if unfortunately you have lost it by sin, and thus derive some merit for the good works you perform during these days of salvation. Lent is a season of especial grace for the returning sinner. It is now that the Divine Shepherd of our souls, who has left the ninety-nine sheep in the desert, is especially solicitous to recover the one that is lost. Of itself it is unable to return. The sinner has lost that grace without which he cannot advance one step towards his true home. The Lord now seeks him out, and, with unspeakable love, exhorts him to return. There may come a day when the Almighty will no longer solicit or await our conversion. Mercy abused will then give way to inexorable justice, and when we least expect it, the indignation of heaven may come upon us for our ruin. God forbid that the experience of any one who hears these words should convince him of this truth! It would be a dearly bought experience indeed.

During this holy time, let all the faithful unite in prayer that the wrath of God may be turned from His creatures, that peace may reign once more on earth, and that there may be harmony and concord among princes and rulers. Do not imagine, dear brethren, that temporal calamities are the effects of chance, or the mere work of the passions or the ambitions of men. Those who, viewing the revolutions which have taken place of late in the world, only look to secondary causes as the immediate agents which produce them, will be apt to attribute the distress of war and other evils in which whole nations have been involved, to the ambitious enterprises of warriors or statesmen, but we, the children of faith, are to look farther. The eye of faith penetrates the veil which is drawn over the acts of God, and discovers in every event the work of that all ruling Providence which extends from one limit of creation to the other and disposes all things wisely for the good of the elect or the chastisement of His rebellious creatures. Convinced of this truth, let us acknowledge the sovereignty of God and our total dependence on Him. Let us put our trust "not in power, nor in gold nor in the possession of many things," but in the Almighty.

In an Encyclical Letter addressed to the Catholic Episcopate,

the Holy Father, after expressing his gratitude to God for the signing of the armistice, says: "There remains now to implore the Almighty that the great gift granted us shall have its crowning, that the delegates of the various nations to meet in solemn congress shall give the world a just and lasting peace. Such grave and complex decisions will have to be taken as no human assembly has ever taken before. Therefore, words are wanting to express how greatly the delegates need to be Divinely enlightened so as to be able to accomplish their mission. Their decisions in the highest degree will affect the interest and good of all humanity. Thus, Catholics who favor order and progress must invoke the Divine assistance upon those participating in the Peace Conference. We desire this duty to be recalled to all Catholics."

In compliance with the wishes of the Holy Father, we ordain that, in parochial churches, public chapels and religious communities, the Litany of the Saints be recited on Sundays after vespers, or any other hour, until the actual declaration of peace. Moreover, we earnestly exhort the faithful to offer every day some prayers, in their own homes, for the Divine guidance of the delegates at the peace conference.

The prayer *Pro Pace*, at Mass, will be said as usual until the declaration of peace.

The regulations for Lent will be the same as those of last year.

The Reverend Clergy will read this letter to their congregations on the first Sunday after its reception.

Given at Saint John on the Feast of Saint Mathias, February 24th, 1919.

† E. A. LEBLANC,
Bishop of Saint John.

Wm. M. DUKE,
Chancellor.

